United Nations S/PV.7660

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7660th meeting
Wednesday, 30 March 2016, 10.25 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/272)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-08855 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/272)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/272, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: After five years of senseless and brutal conflict, we all have been longing for a glimmer of hope that the suffering of the Syrian people might finally be coming to an end. The past few weeks have brought such a glimmer, with far fewer civilians killed and injured since the cessation of hostilities came into effect one month ago. In some parts of the country at least, it has given a respite to people, who have told us loud and clear that all they want is to be safe and for their families to be protected from violence.

There has also been progress on humanitarian access, with the United Nations and partners reaching some additional besieged and hard-to-reach areas, some for the first time in many months or even years. However, much more is required, and we must continue to seek access to all those who need help. There remains no substitute for the process of permissions and careful negotiations with all parties for safe access to areas where vulnerable people are in order to meet their humanitarian needs.

I very much welcome the resumption of the political talks last week, led by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. All of us must rally behind his tireless efforts to find a political solution that brings an end to the conflict and meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. After a chronicle of missed opportunities, this is the time for the various parties to come together and put an end to this horrendous chapter in Syria's history.

I will focus this briefing on the latest information on humanitarian access. I am pleased to report that we have seen some signs of progress over the past few weeks. Humanitarian access has opened up to some besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Since the beginning of the year, we have reached 150,000 people in 11 out of the 18 besieged areas in Syria through inter-agency convoys. Some of the places, such as Madaya, Zabadani, Foah and Kefraya, collectively known as the four towns, have been reached each month this year.

Efforts are also ongoing in order to safely reach the 200,000 people besieged in parts of Deir ez-Zor city through high-altitude air drops led by the World Food Programme (WFP). Furthermore, through inter-agency convoys we have reached some 199,000 people in hard-to-reach locations, including Al-Waer and Al-Houla in Homs governorate and Bloudan in Rural Damascus governorate, as well as around 50,000 people in other priority cross-line locations where needs are dire. Since mid-February, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has also been able to provide assistance to an estimated 19,000 Palestine refugees in Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem, including an estimated 6,000 civilians from the besieged area of Yarmouk.

I also emphatically welcome the Government of Syria's recent commitment to simplifying the administrative procedures for cross-line convoys, answering our requests within seven days of submission and ensuring that the necessary facilitation letters are issued in three days. I am pleased to report that the Government of Syria provided a response to our inter-agency convoy plan for April within the specified time frame. Last year, more than 75 per cent of requests were not answered at all. I also take note of the Syrian authorities' recent approvals for reaching additional hard-to-reach, besieged and other priority locations across conflict lines. Based on approvals received to date, the United Nations is currently working to deliver assistance before the end of April to more than 800,000 people with acute needs in those locations. In addition, assuming that the parties facilitate access and that security conditions allow it, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) aim to implement

a nationwide vaccination campaign that would target about 1 million children.

Even as we acknowledge the recent progress on humanitarian access, we must also recognize that it is only a first step towards what is required. If truth be told, we are a long way from the sustained, unconditional and unimpeded access that is required of the parties under international law and that the Council has continued to demand in its resolutions. Humanitarian conditions remain dire throughout the country, with some 13.5 million people still in need, and we are still facing daily obstacles to our ability to reach those who need our help the most. We have shared details of those obstacles with member States that have influence on the parties in order to see what more they can do to break the barricades to speedy, safe and unimpeded access, relief and evacuations of the sick and wounded.

Many of the 4.6 million people who are in need in besieged and hard-to-reach areas still remain beyond our reach, owing to insecurity and to obstructions by the parties. Even where we are now getting responses, they are often not approved. So far in 2016, we have reached only some 30 per cent of people in besieged areas and less than 10 per cent of those in hard-to-reach areas. Despite recent approvals for some, the Syrian authorities continue not to give approval for certain locations. From the recently submitted plan for cross-line convoys in April, only six of 11 locations were approved by the Syrian authorities, and for some locations they specified delivery quantities that would mean that we could cover only a portion of the population in each area. We are still without approval for three besieged areas that are mere minutes by car from United Nations warehouses in Damascus — Duma, East Harasta and Darayya. The situation in those areas is dreadful, particularly in Darayya, where we continue to receive reports of severe shortages of food, clean water, medicines, electricity and basic commodities, with people's food security and nutrition status believed to be disastrous. There are even reports of people forced to eat grass. The daily misery in those areas shames us all.

The humanitarian situation in many hard-to-reach areas also remains critical. For example, I continue to be deeply troubled about the conditions for the more than 210,000 civilians in northern rural Homs, specifically the towns of Rastan, Talbiseh, Al-Houla, Ter Mallah and Taldo, as well as 15,000 people in the adjacent area of Hirbnafsah and surrounding communities in rural Hama. The people there have essentially no possibility of moving in or out of the areas, and have diminishing access to clean water, medical care and food. The recent convoy to Al-Houla was vital, and approvals for convoys to the other parts of northern rural Homs give hope that we will be able to alleviate some of the suffering, but we remain extremely concerned about the situation facing civilians in those areas. Nor should we forget the situation of the nearly 2 million people estimated to be living under daily oppression and terror in areas held by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We have little or no access to them and continue to receive reports of widespread human-rights abuses.

Even when we do gain access, serious concerns remain about the ongoing exclusion and removal of medical supplies and treatments from convoys. More than 80,000 treatments have been excluded or removed from convoys in 2016, the vast majority by the Syrian authorities. The range of the items removed is scandalous, from items for treating child malnutrition to medicine for preventing bleeding after childbirth. There can be no possible justification for removing those or any other basic medical items. I call on all parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, to enable all necessary medical items and equipment, including surgical items, to be allowed onto the convoys.

Nor are medical evacuations from besieged and hard-to-reach areas being facilitated by the parties to the extent that they should be. While the United Nations and its partners continue to do their best to follow up on individual cases, that is clearly not enough, and people continue to die unnecessarily as a result. I am not in a position to put a number on that, but it is clearly unacceptable. Similarly, medical workers are not getting the access they need to undertake proper medical assessments and treat patients. Having a few hours with patients on the day of a convoy is simply not enough. We need regular access for medical and humanitarian workers for as many follow-up visits as are required.

While the situation is acute in besieged and hard-to reach areas, we must remember that this is a conflict that has affected nearly every Syrian. The destruction of essential infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, the devaluation of the currency, the impact of sanctions, rising food prices, shortages of fuel and electricity and a lack of clean water have exacted a high toll on a majority of Syrian families and communities throughout the country. We have to find ways of doing

better and reaching all people in need, and we have to ensure that they have access to basic and essential services wherever they live.

As the Council knows, our objective as humanitarians is not political or military. It is about providing emergency aid and protection to people in desperate need and precarious circumstances wherever they are in Syria. For that to become a reality, however, the recent opening of access to some locations must be only the start of a step-change in access. Access must go beyond allowing more aid convoys to deliver limited supplies. We must move beyond the notion that one-off, ad hoc distributions of assistance to a particular besieged or hard-to-reach location are somehow sufficient and acceptable, because they are not and never will be. To even begin to address the full range of humanitarian and protection needs in those areas, what we need is a permanent stop to the fighting, an end to the sieges and safe, sustained, unconditional and unimpeded access, so that we can meaningfully reach all those in need as often as is required and by whatever route is necessary. We also need civilians to be able to move freely in and out of areas in order to access basic services and assistance, and we need that now, before it is too late.

I want to pay tribute to the courageous humanitarian organizations and workers who collectively come together to help millions of people each month through all available routes. In February, the World Food Programme, for example, delivered food for 3.8 million people; UNICEF provided water, sanitation and hygiene supplies for over 1.5 million people; WHO delivered over 800,000 treatments; and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees delivered support for almost 500,000 people. Our non-governmental organization partners also continue to assist hundreds of thousands of people each month, both from within Syria and across borders.

Over the past weeks, the United Nations and partners have scaled up assistance to people in need, including cross-border assistance from Turkey to meet the needs of the over 60,000 people newly displaced close to the Turkish border owing to the heavy fighting and aerial bombardment in Aleppo governorate throughout February, before the start of the cessation of hostilities.

Our challenge now is to scale up assistance further to reach the level required. We are ready to take advantage of any opportunity to assist people in need. On 15 March, five years into the conflict in Syria, 102 humanitarian agencies called for immediate and sustained access in Syria. I repeat that call today, particularly for the parties to the conflict and Member States with influence to guarantee full access for humanitarian and medical workers to assess the well-being of civilians in all communities and treat those who are sick and injured without obstacle or restriction; allow all humanitarian aid, as required by international humanitarian law, to reach, unimpeded, those who urgently need it — including medical supplies, surgical equipment and nutritional necessities; and support an urgently needed nationwide immunization campaign for children. These are practical and immediate actions that would mean the difference between life and death for many people. All parties to the conflict can agree on and implement them now.

The cessation of hostilities should also be the catalyst that finally brings an end to the indiscriminate use of weapons on civilians, residential areas, aid supply routes and other civilian infrastructure protected under international law. Already this year, far too many civilians have been killed or injured in direct or indiscriminate attacks by all parties, owing to the continued use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including through barrel bombs and other aerial weapons, shelling and car bombs. It is time to say enough is enough.

The lessons of history should tell us that peace cannot wait any longer in Syria. The consequences of failing to resolve the Syrian conflict in Syria, in the region and beyond are now lamentably clear. The past few weeks have shown, however, that when there is the right amount of political will, the parties and the international community can come together to find ways to reduce the suffering of civilians and engage in talks to bring an end to the conflict. It is the sincere hope of all humanitarians that these talks will pave the path to peace in Syria.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now invite members to consultations to continue our discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.